

Going Soft by lavenderfieldscemetery

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Summary: Patrick Hockstetter never really had any friends for as long as he could remember. He was just too odd... Or even insane as some would say. Patrick Hockstetter x Henry Bowers

Going Soft

1

Being the type of boy to hardly say a word and follow other kids around aimlessly with his facial expression a sombre mask, even Patrick was surprised to find himself inviting his sometimes-friend Henry Bowers round to play. Not only was Henry a complete polar opposite to himself, but he was also a bully and a delinquent - most of the time lost in his own little bubble of self-hatred and the lack of compassion for others. Patrick had to admit he was fascinated by the older boy sitting two seats behind himself. Henry was a sadist, Patrick knew that at least (spending a lot of his time sitting alone on a bench in the playground had made him rather observant and knowing of others). The way he often gave those little shits Chinese burns, or perhaps threatening some poor, unfortunate classmate with the promise of a cherry bomb down their pants had thrilled Patrick to say the least. Not even deep down did Patrick know the things Henry Bowers does are wrong and immoral. All he could see was that Henry was powerful and energetic with rather the fascinating twist of a sadist - and that was why he found himself approach Henry and his greaser gang in the playground on that particularly warm home-time of May, 1958. Patrick felt the eyes of almost a hundred boys and girls bore into his, and only his back. It was a good thing he was a dizzy, self-confident boy with very little grip on reality; all those pairs of eyes were enough to send anyone into a fluster. Immediately, everybody had stopped talking. There was complete and utter silence that was almost suffocating in nature.

The words had escaped his livery lips before he could save himself:

'Would you like to come round and play, Henry?'

The silence carried on for only a few moments, giving the confused Henry a chance to register just what that looney-bin Patrick had said. And just like that, Henry and his large gang had spluttered into malicious, jeering, crowing laughter. Patrick Hockstetter stood for a moment, swaying uneasily on the spot, a complacent smile plastered across his pale and sun-burnt face. He wasn't entirely sure what to do. After all, he only asked Henry a simple question, right? They

were both speaking plain old English, so why was there almost a language barrier between the pair? What on earth made those guys laugh like that, Patrick had no idea as he only asked a straightforward, un-amusing question that wasn't weird nor too personal...

'What's so fucking funny...?'

Henry's face was what Patrick knew was a disguised smirk. He was trying to act all big and mighty by pretending he was disgusted by the idea, and Patrick wouldn't be taken as a fool.

'It's just you in general, Hockstetter,' the older boy scoffed, rolling his eyes and swinging his arm over Victor Criss' shoulder. After he had spoken, Henry slowly unwrapped a bubble gum (keeping his eyes locked stonily with Patrick's the entire time) and popped it in his mouth. 'I mean, even the way you speak is so fucking embarrassing! "Would you like to come out and *plaaayyy*?"' He imitated Patrick in a simpler-y, high-pitched squeal and waved his hands about in mockery.

Again with the humiliating laughter in the background. This time, it wasn't just Henry's gang, it was most of the kids in the Derry Elementary playground. If Patrick wasn't so in love with himself, his cheeks would be flaming right now.

'Well... would you? I'm still waiting for an answer,' Patrick whispered huskily in return, his dusty green eyes still boring into Henry's and as wide as saucers.

Henry lunged until he was two inches from Patrick's face. Patrick could feel Henry's fruity breath tickle his face - they were close enough to kiss. Patrick giggled at this thought, causing Henry to grow more agitated by the second. Blowing a big pink bubble of his gum into Patrick's shrinking-away face until it was large enough to pop, Henry chewed it back into his mouth and stepped back, grinning devilishly to all his greaser companions. Each boy had the cynically amused expression of somebody who had just been told that dinosaurs were still alive by some small child.

Still laughing slightly and making his voice come out shakily, Henry addressed all his gang; 'Did you hear Hockstetter? He asked me if I wanted to *play*...'

Eddie Corcoran clasped a hand to his mouth and spluttered until his olive skin had turned the colour of tomato soup. Tears sparkled in Victor's blue eyes and Belch was doubled over in laughter. A nearby group of girls from their homeroom (Patrick could tell they were those rich bitches Veronica Grogan and Greta Bowie) were giggling slightly, although, like Patrick himself, they were secretly rather confused and were wondering what could be so funny to Henry.

'So?' Patrick replied confidently, now feeling better from having more personal space.

'So, it makes you sound like one of those baby-fags. Try repeating after me, okay, Hockstetter?' Henry drawled cockily, still chewing his gum with his mouth wide open.

'Fine...' Patrick wasn't entirely sure he liked this...

'I, Patrick Hockstetter, am a pansy,' Henry laughed, causing his peers to burst out into fresh hysterics.

'I, Patrick Hockstetter, am a pansy,' Patrick sighed.

'Patrick Hockstetter is a homo,'

'Patrick Hockstetter is a homo,' Patrick was starting to feel ashamed...

'Henry Bowers is the best!'

'Henry Bowers is the best...'

'You didn't sound like you meant it!'

'Henry Bowers is the best!' Patrick yelled, alerting the whole playground to what was going on.

'That's it. Good boy,' the eldest smirked in his typical self-satisfied manner. He approached Patrick in a few quick strides and shoved his backpack over Patrick's shoulders. 'Alright, I'll come home with you after you amused me like that. I hope you enjoyed our little joke as much as I did... I wasn't planning on fuckin' going home anyway - the old man's mad with me.' With that last line, Eddie, Victor and Belch

all chuckled together darkly - each one of them inwardly glad they weren't Patrick Hockstetter.

Patrick smiled dotingly up at Henry, his green eyes shining with the thought of having Henry Bowers in his own home. Henry glared down at him and then turned to his friends, 'Well, I'll be seeing you. If I haven't been murdered by crazy-ass Patrick that is!'

His friends gave one final laugh before dispersing off to make their own ways home. Belch lived up near the large houses along with Veronica and Greta, and Victor lived just a few roads down from Henry's and Mike Hanlon's, whereas Eddie was situated in the 'poor' side of Derry along with Beverly Marsh and would rather his friends didn't know where he lived... This left Henry and Patrick alone - and Henry wasn't entirely pleased with the situation. He didn't know Patrick all that well. In fact, the only time they had spoken was in the first few weeks of September when he had swore at Patrick for running his hand up and down his thigh when they had temporarily sat together. Patrick, in his own little way, was completely satisfied. What could be better than having your idol in your own home?

'Do you have extra money for the bus?' Henry asked.

'Yeah, I'll pay for ya if you want...'

'Good, because I don't have any money today. My fuckin' dad took my lunch money to buy a Budweiser,' Henry grumbled bitterly, cursing his father inwardly. 'Usually I just walk home. It's a real long way and that stupid Hanlon always gets out before me, so I have to creep behind him the whole time to avoid talking to him...'

Patrick smiled at the thought of Henry sneaking up on Mike and handed the bus conductor the money for two tickets. Without thanking the man, he grabbed Henry's wrist and dragged him to a seat near the back, both backpacks still swung over each shoulder. Henry stumbled along behind him and tripped down the last couple of steps to the back of the bus.

'Hey, watch it, Hockstetter!'

Patrick didn't bother apologising and simply threw himself down on

the nearest seat. Seeing as it was the neighbouring seat to the aisle down the middle, this caused Henry to awkwardly shuffle sideways past Patrick to get to the window seat in the tight space provided. The backs of Henry's legs brushed against Patrick's own as he went, and Patrick had to use every cell in his body to resist from grabbing Henry from behind whilst he moved. After squeezing his way past the younger boy, Henry flung his exhausted body down into the seat provided and sat slumped with his legs spread far apart. Both the smell and feel of the air-conditioner cooling his flushed face was pleasing, and Henry grew relaxed as the school bus slowly wound its way around the many blocks of Derry, every so often some kid hopping off and rushing into their homes. As it was a Friday - Henry's favourite day of the week - many of those children jumped off accompanied by a friend or two. For once in his life, Patrick Hockstetter was one of those kids that took friends home with him or her! That same pride from earlier filled his typically empty and unfeeling chest, making him grin from ear to ear the whole journey home. Henry glanced every so often at his younger friend's face, each time feeling as equally disturbed as the previous time he risked peering at his pallid profile.

'So, you're Patrick *Hockstetter* right?'

Feeling miffed that Henry didn't even know his name in confidence, Patrick turned to him, his smile faltering for just a fraction of a second before he burst out; 'Yeah! And you're *Henrietta* Bowers, aren't you?!'

'You little-' Henry was cut off by the bus stopping abruptly outside what Henry presumed was Patrick's house, as when it stopped, Patrick shot up like a jack in a box and raced down the aisle, once again dragging Henry by the wrist as he went.

The hot air from outside hit Henry's face as he was forced out the comforting cool of the bus. Outside, the sky was the perfect shade of almost cyan blue and not one lone cloud tainted what both boys could honestly call a perfect day. As the bus departed, Henry and Patrick were left to stand on the curb, school bags trailing onto the pavement in the great weight of the homework. A strange woman seated on the porch that reminded Henry a little of Audrey Hepburn was dressed in a pretty, pink and white striped dress and reclined on

a rocking chair, sunning herself whilst reading some old romance novel. She sprung up immediately at the sight of Patrick and waved energetically over to him, beaming in the way somebody would although they knew they were extraordinarily lucky. Patrick raised one hand in greeting and called over to her; 'Hey, mommy! I've brought a friend home!' He rushed over to the porch's front door and leaned against the balcony's railings, leaving Henry to trail after him stiffly.

'That's great, Patty!' She beamed, then turning to Henry she added, 'What's your name, sweetheart?'

Henry blinked at her term of affectionate address (he's never been called *sweetheart* before!) before mumbling, 'Henry Bowers...' and ducking his head.

The woman smiled in welcome and led the pair into the house. Inside, it looked although Mrs Hockstetter had a strong say in the decor - it was fresh-looking and girly, just like the way she was presented. 'Just tell me if you need any snacks, boys. I'll be outside reading.' With that, she left the two boys alone.

Henry's eyes widened at the look Patrick was giving him. 'What, man? You're giving me the creeps.'

'Nothing, Henry. I'm just so happy to have you in my home!'

'Well, whatever... Just *please* don't do anything weird.'

'I won't!' Patrick chirruped cheerfully and bounded up the stairs, gesturing for Henry to follow. Henry sighed. He could tell it was going to be the longest fucking day of his life...

2

After briefly showing Henry his odd little room (Henry was still shuddering from memories of all those creepy taxidermy beetles he had on display), Patrick bopped excitedly outside into the back garden, obviously still very jubilant at having his almost-idol inside his very own house.

In the garden was a swing set. However, this very same swing set

gave Henry a hollow feeling inside his chest. Somewhat, the swing set looked like it had been frozen in time, the seat swaying and swinging like a ghost child was playing on it; flowers, weeds and overgrown grass curling around the stainless steel legs of the set.

'My little brother and I play here,' Patrick smiled up at Henry, noticing the forlorn expression on his face.

'Where's your brother? Is he getting home from school now?' Henry asked, not particularly interested in the answer he was anticipating. He was only making small talk...

'Avery won't ever be getting home from school,' Patrick shot back, his tone taking on an anguished, almost dangerous, dark tone.

'Um, what do you mean?'

'Dead.'

'Oh...'

Of course Henry wasn't to know this. Today was, in fact, the only time he had chatted to Patrick properly. As insensitive as he is, even Henry felt bad for bringing up this topic, and to be respectable, he added: 'I'm sorry.'

Patrick paused, the same, complacent smile reappearing on his moon-face, 'Don't be... We never agreed with each other. I prefer it this way.'

Henry seemed confused and almost sickened as he came close to brushing past the truth. Quickly, the younger boy added, 'Let's go back inside. Mommy will get mad with us for being out here. It makes her all fuckin' depressed.'

Henry nodded once in agreement. After all, he wanted to get in somebody's good books for once, and it would give Josephine Hockstetter a bad first impression of him if he made her feel sad by opening old wounds.

For a while, the two boys sat curled up on Patrick's bedroom floor, alternating between playing Monopoly and pouring over Patrick's

collection of vinyl records. Before they knew it, two hours had already passed. The clock read 6:34, and Patrick knew his father would be getting home from work any minute. Before the thought had barely left his confused little head, he could hear keys turning in the lock of the front door.

Leaving Henry to steal an extra \$500 note from the 'bank', Patrick rushed downstairs to greet his father. 'Dad!' He ran into him and wrapped him in a clingy embrace, clutching at his tan trench coat. Taking the briefcase out of his hands, Patrick shoved it to one side and hugged him closer. At this moment, Henry was loitering around the staircase uncomfortably, sadly watching the whole scene take place. Deep down, Henry badly wished that this could be himself and his own dad - but even deeper down, he knew that would never happen. His dad hated him. And he knew it. Oh, how he knew it.

As the father and son separated themselves, Henry averted his eyes, not wishing for Patrick to smugly know what he was thinking by the desperate glint in his brown eyes.

'Did you have a nice day at school?'

'Yes I did, daddy. Guess what! Henry's here!' Patrick chortled, jabbing his left index finger over at Henry who was currently not knowing what to do with himself, swaying confusedly on the top of the staircase.

'Oh hi, umm...'

'Henry. Henry Bowers, sir.'

'Nice to meet you, Henry,' Patrick's dad beamed, just as friendly as his wife. He took off his bowler hat and placed it on the coat rack. Patrick's mom came rushing out the kitchen to greet him and peck him on the cheek. Henry had to admit they were like the perfect family. Jealousy clutched at his chest.

'Well, Henry and I are-'

'Don't go anywhere yet,' Mrs Hockstetter piped in before her son could finish his sentence, 'Dinner's ready.'

'Great!' Patrick replied cheerfully, 'What's for dinner?'

'I made some pizza. That okay?'

'Sounds delicious,' her husband said and seated himself at the table. Patrick and Henry joined him - Henry all the time taking envious mental notes on how phonily perfect the Hockstetter's seemed. Surely nobody else's family is so obviously staged? It seemed like there was some underlying layer of poison underneath all that lovey-dovey, gooey, sickening, saccharine sweetness the Hockstetter's displayed. Henry knew it. He was positive. Of course his family was a million miles from perfect or loving, and he would give anything to be a part of the Hockstetter's false caring facade, but he couldn't help but feel there was something not quite right in the atmosphere...

Mrs Hockstetter had handed out plates to the three men and delivered the burnt pepperoni pizza to the table. After saying grace, she cut it into slithers and told everybody to tuck in. Before Henry had even finished his first slice, he had found himself choking on a mouthful as soon as his friend had opened his mouth; 'Can Henry stay over night for a sleepover?' Patrick enquired sweetly, cocking his head to the side slightly like a confused dog. On his face was a plastered-on simper that was supposed to appear innocent. Well, it seemed that way to Patrick. He probably practised it in the mirror every day.

His parents exchanged glances before turning to Patrick.

'Well, why not?' Ronald Hockstetter grinned at his son. Back in the 30s, he had enjoyed having sleepover parties with his two friends. In fact, Ronald had always wished for Patrick to have real friends like he used to, so why say no at a time like this? Friends were rare for his son.

Henry's eyes bulged.

'I can't think of reason why not...' Patrick's mom shrugged and smiled over at Henry, obviously not sensing the complete and utter discomfort displayed on his paling face. 'You're welcome to stay the night, Henry.'

'Well... Um-'

'Yay! Thanks mom and dad!' Patrick yelled before Henry could get a word out, 'Henry, this is gonna be so much fuckin' fun!' His father cleared his throat, so Patrick quickly added a garbled, 'Sorry for swearing, dad...'

Eating as fast as he could manage, Henry attempted to make an excuse to go back home away from Patrick. As much as he liked it at the Hockstetter's house, he had to admit, spending a night with screwy Patrick Hockstetter would be just as painful as torture! He could already feel a migraine beginning at the base of his skull. Okay, he *could* admit he was enjoying himself... and a sleepover would be an excellent opportunity to get away from his father for a while... But, was it worth risking being murdered by Patrick? He'd just have to take a chance. Typically Henry wouldn't bother with manners, but today he felt they'd really come in handy.

'Thank you for inviting me round for the night, Mrs and Mr Hockstetter.'

3

It was rare that Patrick's family would leave him alone in the house, but it was even rarer that his parents got the chance to go out for the evening. Feeling bad for using Henry Bowers as a kind of odd babysitter for their son, Mr and Mrs Hockstetter waved to the boys from the car and drove off to catch a movie at the Aladdin Theatre. Henry admitted that the situation just got a whole lot worse. He didn't even know it could - but it did. He was alone. With Hockstetter... His eyes narrowed as he watched Patrick's parents race down Maple Oaks Avenue, certain of the fact he had been tricked into looking after their deranged son.

'This is the best! I can't believe my parents left us alone.'

'What are you talking about?' Henry hissed, the hurt evident in his voice, 'Now I have to babysit *you* for the rest of the night!'

'And how is that a bad thing?' Patrick questioned, his eyes boring into Henry's with a fierce intensity.

'Well, for one, you're *completely insane*. Secondly, I think you're a homo. Don't try anything funny with me because it won't work. Thirdly, your bedroom creeps me out so bad! Why do you keep *animal fur* and *beetles*? That's just crazy!'

After saying all this, Henry sunk to the floor with his head in his hands. He couldn't believe he'd been hoodwinked so easily. Despite being insulted; Patrick felt he needed to comfort Henry somehow, but he wasn't sure why, or how.

'Don't be sad...' Patrick said softly, running a hand gently through his hair, 'Look, my parents have beer down in the kitchen. I'll fetch you some if you want. If it would make it all better, I mean...'

Henry glanced up. 'Really? You really fuckin mean it? Don't go playin' tricks on me, Hockstetter. I'll fuck you up.'

'Yeah, really. I'll get it for you now, if it would make you happy,' Patrick leered, rolling his eyes.

'Fuck yeah! Thanks, Patrick, you're so fuckin amazing.'

After rolling his eyes one final time, Patrick grabbed a bubble gum out of Henry's outstretched hand and shoved it in his mouth. He disappeared downstairs. Two minutes. Five. Henry was growing tense. Paranoid. *What if he ain't really grabbing a pack of beer? What if it's a knife? A gun?* The eldest boy was relieved when Patrick returned with Budweisers in hand.

'Great. That didn't take you long.'

Patrick tilted his head in confusion. 'What do you mean?'

'I got so scared waiting for you. For all I knew, you could have been preparing to kill me or something!'

The youngest greaser made a gun with his fingers and aimed it in between Henry's eyes. '*Bang!*'

Henry laughed darkly, suddenly growing relaxed. *The kid's harmless! Why people think Patrick Hockstetter is bat-shit crazy, I'll never know.* He couldn't be more wrong. Taking Patrick's double barrelled 'gun' away

from his forehead, Henry caught a Budweiser from Patrick's left-handed throw and cracked it open, grinning widely. At home, if his father caught him doing anything out of line, he'd be beaten to a pulp. Even if he just *toed* the line from time to time...

'Would I kill you?' Patrick teased.

'Hmm, I really don't know,' Henry shrugged, raising his eyebrows, 'You're supposedly fucking-A crazy-town, so you tell me.'

Patrick giggled, and soon enough he felt he wouldn't be able to stop. Henry smiled his devilish, awful smile; slightly alarmed at how the subject of death could make Patrick so hysterical.

'Quit laughing, tits. You're really bugging me out!'

'Aww, Henry, I'm sorry,' the youngest laughed airily, his voice sounding like a bell caught in the wind, 'I wouldn't do anything to hurt you. Sincerely. And I'm *not* crazy.'

The greaser boy flashed his teeth in a sullen smile, quickly taking a sip of the beer and reclined against the wall adjacent to Patrick's bed. 'You couldn't hurt me anyway, Hockstetter. You're too much of a pansy.'

In reality, Patrick had no sense of hurting or being hurt. He could really mutilate anybody he pleases and not feel a jot of guilt. Not realising that 'pansy' was meant as an insult, Patrick thanked his friend, much to Henry's amusement.

Patrick took a swig of his beer, wrinkled his nose, then drank the whole bottle down in one.

'You're not supposed to drink it like that!'

The youngest laughed and soon hiccupped afterwards. He really had never drunk alcohol before - Henry could tell. The way he was going, he was going to be pissed within a half hour. Thinking back to the time he got drunk with Vic and Belch down at the dump, Henry realised that it would be best to drink as much as he could, when he could. Vic and Belch can get weird when they're intoxicated. Hopefully Patrick wouldn't be the same, but Henry really doubted it.

He was one weird cookie even when sober...

About one hour later, both boys had consumed the whole six pack of Budweisers between them, and Patrick's parents had called to say they were going to visit Patrick's grandmother for the evening as they were in the area. They had trusted Henry and Patrick to be responsible, and when Patrick answered the phone, not even the sharp Ronald could detect the slurring in Patrick's voice. It was eleven o'clock when his parents got back, and in that time the two boys were completely drunk.

'Hey, Henry, I'm real tired, you know.'

Even in Henry's drunken state, he could tell his friend was trying to discreetly seduce him into getting into bed with him; and there was no way he was ever going to let that happen.

'Go to bed then.'

'But... what about you?'

'I'll be fine waiting for your parents to get back.'

Patrick rubbed his eyes for good measure. 'Where will you sleep though?' A complacent smile worked its way onto his cadaverous face. Henry hadn't realised up until now, but there was only one single bed between the two of them. He could have slapped himself for being so stupid.

A moan escaped Henry's lips, 'Ugh, fine then. I guess I'll have to sleep with you.'

Patrick's livery lips formed a cruel smirk. He tore off his school clothes (a sweater vest, checked shirt, knee-length shorts and ankle socks with creepers), not caring that Henry was watching and pulled on his blue and white striped pyjamas. Folding them neatly and placing them over his desk chair, Patrick hopped into bed and under the covers. Green eyes blinking, he waited for Henry to do the same.

'No, Patrick. I'm not doing this.'

Patrick's eyes looked pleading yet at the same time, they had a glint

of pure malice that clearly said, 'if you don't do this, you're obviously pussy.'

'Fine.' Instead of going to change in the bathroom like he first intended, Henry saw the look in Patrick's eyes as a challenge and refused to back down. He had a competitive spirit and didn't like to lose. No longer caring that he didn't have any bedclothes to change into (*why should it matter? We're both boys*) Henry took off his jeans and threw them onto the floor, his cheeks not flaming as he expected them to. They remained a dull pink as always. Wearing just his thankfully too long and baggy T-shirt and underpants, Henry threw back the covers and told Patrick to budge over. The smell of sweat and fruity bubble gum from Henry wasn't entirely unpleasant to Patrick as he shifted over against the cool of the wall. The room was now cast in a dark shadow from the setting summer sun, and the curtains billowed with every slight breeze. Henry was thankful for the lack of the ghost moon in the night's sky. However; he also had to confide to himself that he was actually gratified by the comfort of having somebody to sleep with, in the most innocent sense of the term. Sure it was hot having Hockstetter cramped up beside him. Sure it was slightly uncomfortable... But Henry was also sure that he would feel safe to wake up in the dark with somebody beside him.